

# Illinois Towards Equity Action Framework & Toolkit



## Office of Equity

Office of Governor  
JB Pritzker

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## **Historical Context**

Illinois state government serves almost 13 million people within 2 counties. Though the state now known as Illinois was already home of many Native groups, such as the Peoria, Kaskaskia, Cahokia, Tamaroa, Moingwena, Taponero, Coiracoentanon, Chaokia, Chipussea, and Michigamea.<sup>i</sup> Illinois was established and built its wealth through the displacement of its Indigenous people;<sup>ii</sup> the chattel enslavement and free labor of African Americans;<sup>iii</sup> the exclusion of women from public life;<sup>iv</sup> the institutionalization and mass neglect of people with disabilities;<sup>v</sup> and the forced assimilation of immigrants.<sup>vi</sup> These well-documented dimensions of Illinois' history laid the foundation of the current forms of structural racism, classism, sexism, ageism, ableism, xenophobia, transphobia,<sup>vii</sup> and other forms of inequality that persist throughout the state's services and systems today.<sup>viii</sup> Illinois state laws and legislation can also be traced as sources of institutionalizing and legally sanctioning the aforementioned structural forms of dominance and social control that have systematically implemented discriminatory employment practices,<sup>ix</sup> housing insecurity,<sup>x</sup> educational gaps,<sup>xi</sup> food insecurity,<sup>xii</sup> inequitable health care systems,<sup>xiii</sup> family separation,<sup>xiv</sup> and the over policing<sup>xv</sup> of poor<sup>xvi</sup>, Indigenous,<sup>xvii</sup> and communities of color<sup>xviii</sup> that have exacerbated inequitable opportunities, outcomes, and wellbeing for generations.

Illinois also has a long and proud history of advocacy, safety net supports, active community-based organizations, and devoted elected officials, who have been committed to building a better Illinois for all. Over the past three 3 years, Governor JB Pritzker along with members of the Illinois General Assembly have provided strong leadership during COVID-19 global pandemic to protect the lives of people across Illinois, while also working together to respond to the inequities and injustices that persist for many who live and work in the state. Their joint [achievements](#) combined with our state agencies shared responsibility to equitably provide resources, programs and support as public servants to equitably serve the people of Illinois, are the foundations of advancing Illinois Towards Equity.

## **Office of Equity**

On June 30, 2021, Governor JB Pritzker signed Executive Order [2021-16](#) to further exemplify his commitment to strengthen Illinois state government with the aforementioned historical context in mind and to provide support and leadership to those working within state agencies who have been leading the charge to creating a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, accessible, and just state government.

The Office of Equity, as the name indicates, prioritizes equity as its central focus but views diversity, inclusion, and accessibility as core foundational elements that contribute to an equitable state government. The Office conceptualizes the foundational element [diversity](#) as the representation of people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences and [inclusion](#) as the action or state of including and feeling as an empowered sense of belonging within a group or organizational. Likewise, The Office for Civil Rights (OCR) at the U.S. Department of Education defines accessibility as meaning “when a person with a disability is afforded the opportunity to acquire the same information, engage in the same interactions, and enjoy the same services as a person without a disability in an equally integrated and equally effective manner, with substantially equivalent ease of use.” The Office of Equity, like many others in the field, extends accessibility beyond disability to include the creation of financially, technologically, and linguistically accessible systems, resources, and services so that all can thrive in a society. Each of these three foundational elements contribute to [equity](#)—“the state, quality or ideal of being just, impartial and fair.” Equity must also be both structural and systemic and comprised of a robust infrastructure and dynamic process that produces equitable ideas, power, and resources. The Office of Equity’s vision and overarching goals are derived from its mission of advancing equity within Illinois state government.

**Vision:** That Illinois is a state free of social inequity with a healthy and thriving population with access to high quality services delivered by a diverse, inclusive, equity-oriented, and accessible state government.

**Goals:**

- To partner with the Office of the Governor, state leaders, and stakeholders to ensure that the State of Illinois is a model for justice, equity, opportunity and access by working to eliminate institutional and systemic barriers for the people of Illinois.
- To create a sustainable DEIA statewide infrastructure that normalizes and operationalizes equity, inclusion, opportunity, and access into every aspect of the state's workforce, systems, and services.
- To ensure diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility standards of excellence are integrated into the strategic priorities of state agencies, boards, and commissions.
  - To create sustainable trainings that increase the knowledge and skills of the state workforce regarding to facilitate equitable and accessible policies, set standards, and shift organizational culture.
  - To ensure all state agency DEIA goals are aligned with the Office of Equity’s strategic priorities and are responsive to the unique needs of individual agencies and the services they provide to the people of Illinois.

**Theory of Change:** The Office of Equity embraces intersectional and social determinants (SDOH)<sup>xix</sup> public health frameworks as the most useful perspectives to redress the structural, intermediary, institutional, community, and relational causes of social inequities. The intermediary causes or the social determinants that lead to inequities is a critical point of prevention and intervention that would create better conditions for increased outcomes for people working and living in the state of Illinois.

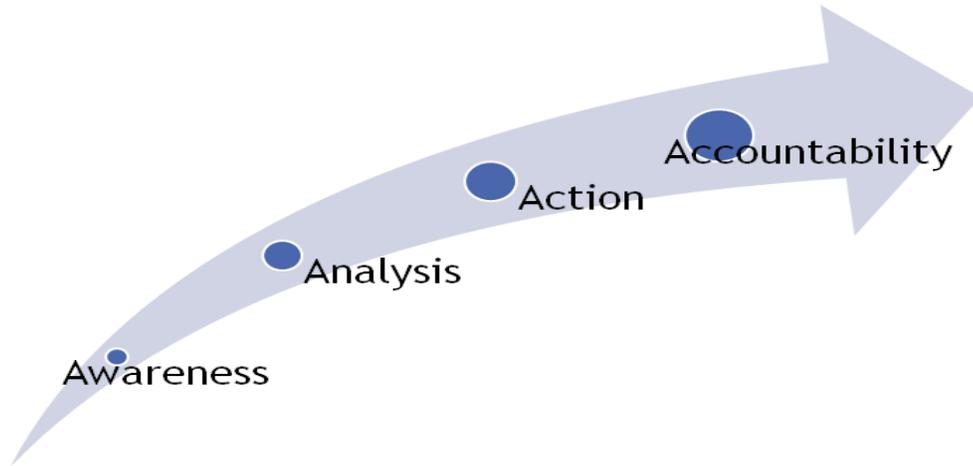
Social stratifications such as income, race, gender, disability, sexuality and age do not operate unilaterally. They intersect to produce complex systems of power, privilege and access to resources. These intertwined systems simultaneously produce compounded forms of oppression and social and economic disadvantage for many in Illinois and beyond. In response, the Office of Equity insists that there is a dire need to craft equitable systems and policies throughout Illinois state government to redress unjust and inequitable social conditions by advancing diversity, equity, inclusion and accessibility throughout state agencies and through public policy.

The State of Illinois, like the nation, continues to face an unprecedented crisis due to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has intensified economic inequality and further exposed the persistence of unequal access to educational, health, and human services, and has ballooned costs of living and housing insecurity. The Office of Equity is committed to partnering with leaders in state government and in our communities in order to strengthening of state systems/agencies and ensure the distribution of public resources equitably in underserved and disinvested communities to better the living and social conditions needed to increase the quality of life for all people of Illinois.

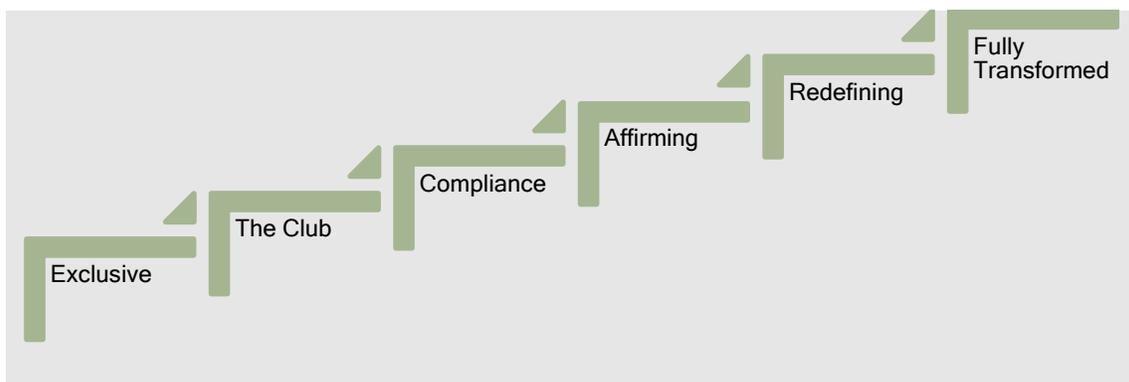
While our office recognizes structural changes should be the primary point of social and fiscal investment for any society, our work intentionally engages state agencies, boards, commissions, and systems at the institutional level policy change. Identifying and dismantling institutionalized barriers that limit people's access to resources is essential in that they most often are the contributors to better quality of life. We view social institutions like state agencies as complex and adaptive systems that are malleable to change. Our office's systems level work advocates for institutional/agency policies and practices that ensure people are given access to high quality resources no matter the body they live in or the zip code they live in. We assert that the establishment of healthy working, learning, and living environments are the foundation of equity and strive to ensure thriving outcomes for people and strong communities.

Inequities that are produced by the lack of money, resources, privilege, and power to make decisions in one's life manifest in vulnerabilities, marginalization, and a poorer quality of life. The Office of Equity works to increase inclusive practices and processes within Illinois' state agencies, boards, commissions, and systems that support a higher quality of life for groups with histories of

oppression and social disadvantage. Foundational steps include the individual professional growth process of developing a *Liberatory Consciousness* through greater awareness, analysis, action, and accountability.<sup>xx</sup>



- The critical action step of developing a Liberatory Consciousness is bolstered by the state’s now required *Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Training for State Employees and Appointees*, which sets a higher professional expectation and creates an opportunity for further individual growth for the state’s workforce. The Office of Equity is launching the *Illinois Towards Equity Toolkit* to establish a shared process for DEIA action planning and, and to create an accountability process for agencies as they strive to provide more equitable resources, services, and programs by centering our underserved and disinvested communities throughout the state. These critical system wide actions should aid state agencies in growing along an *Organizational Continuum* from closed systems to fully transformed systems<sup>xxi</sup> that are engaged in continuous assessment, growth, and quality improvement in order to best serve and support the people of Illinois.



## Illinois Toward Equity: A Plan for Action and Accountability

### **Making the Transition: From DEI Action Plans to Illinois Towards Equity**

The Office of Equity founding year focused on developing the foundation for the creation of a statewide diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility infrastructure with actionable and sustainable processes that empower agencies to implement their DEIA work in impactful, transformative, transparent, and accountable ways. The Office's founding year's engagements with agencies have informed the creation of its current initiatives and the creation of the *Illinois Towards Equity Framework* and toolkit. The office's lessons learned through supporting agencies within the Governor's cabinet through their 2020-2021 Governor's Office DEI Action planning and implementation processes, which were developed in partnership with the , provided a blueprint for creating the *Illinois Toward Equity Toolkit* that serves the unique needs of state agencies who have varying levels of resources, served diverse regions across the state, and faced compounding public needs for additional support during the COVID-19 pandemic. The transition between processes is captured below. See Appendix A for the Office of Equity's methodology for the creation of the Illinois Towards Equity toolkit, reporting template, and engagement process.

### **Making the Transition: From DEI Action Plans to Illinois Towards Equity**

<b>Governor's Office DEI Action Plans (2020)</b>	<b>Governor's Office of Equity's Illinois Towards Equity DEIA Action Plans (2022)</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Guidance on Action Plan Formatting<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Needs assessment + agency listening sessions</li><li>• Supporting materials (guides, etc.)</li></ul></li><li>• Guidance on Hierarchy within Action Plans<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Actions/Tasks/Strategies -&gt; Objectives -&gt; Goals</li></ul></li><li>• Guidance on Goal Setting</li><li>• Centered on Full Agency Autonomy<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creation of goals, objectives, actions/tasks/strategies</li></ul></li><li>• Offered regular individualized technical support sessions</li><li>• Creation of tracking and reporting incorporated into the next phase of the project</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Guidance on Action Plan Creation<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Creation of a new, standardized Action Plan Template</li><li>• Establishment of Specific Agency Roles</li><li>• Toolkit with a phased expansion of resources</li><li>• Agency Transition Plan &amp; Materials</li></ul></li><li>• Balance between Interagency Standardization and Agency Autonomy</li><li>• Establishes of Formal Reporting Process &amp; Calendar</li><li>• Creates a series of supporting sessions for planning, implementation and reporting</li><li>• Establishes an internal quality assurance process centered around accessibility</li></ul>

## **Rationale**

Each of the Office's founding year's learnings from its engagement with agencies, the Office of the Governor, community members, stakeholders, and from members from the General Assembly provided the Office with a data and experience that informed the Office's rationale for developing the ***Illinois Toward Equity Framework and Action Planning Toolkit***. Specifically, the Office of Equity's founding year's engagements revealed a need for:

- Developing a state government relevant process for pursuing state government-focused DEIA goals.
- Establishing a unified approach to understand, track and report ongoing DEIA gaps, efforts and progress made by individual agencies and across Illinois state government.
- Building upon the current DEIA (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Access) needs, efforts/action plans, and key learnings—i.e. framework and toolkit are state data and experience informed.
- Grounding the process in a theory of change informed by intersectionality and social determinants of health.

## **Framework**

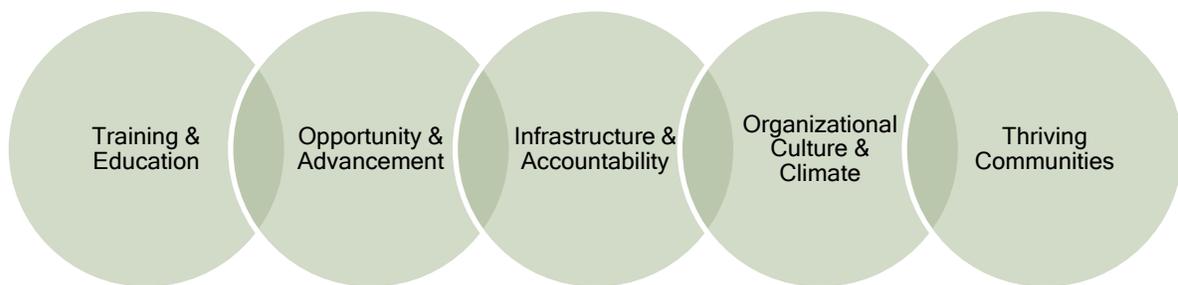
The Illinois Towards Equity (ITE) was developed to create unified approaches and strategies to advance equity across Illinois State Government that are informed by the Office of Equity's intersectional and social determinants of health theory of change.

The plan exists to establish a coordinated effort across State agencies engaged equity work, and to invigorate these efforts, so that State Government can fulfil its service role to the people of Illinois. It does not replace prior and ongoing diversity, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and justice-oriented work that state agencies have been conducting to advance equity in Illinois – rather it seeks to unify and amplify these efforts.

The *Illinois Towards Equity Action Framework* is a conceptual, grounding, foundational document that was developed by the Office of Equity after careful consultation with imbedded diversity, equity, and inclusion change agents both within and beyond state government. This data and experience informed process led to the creation of this grounding document in which the accompanying tools and action plans can flow and from which ongoing agency strategies will be drawn going forward.

The *Action Framework* and action planning process encompasses five interconnected domains and that lay the foundation for culture change within Illinois State Government and within agencies. The five domains are key areas of organizational change and often require coordination and collaboration within and across state agencies.

### **Five Action Domains of Advancing Illinois Towards Equity**



### **Illinois Towards Equity Domains Defined:**

#### **TRAINING & EDUCATION**

- Increasing the state workforce’s foundational knowledge of key DEIA-related terms and concepts as well as the accountability for personal and professional action steps that increase their colleagues’ sense of equity, inclusion, accessibility, safety and belonging in their workplace, their state agency, and Illinois state government.

#### **OPPORTUNITY & ADVANCEMENT**

- Systematic review, revision, replacement, and creation of agency-specific, and whenever possible, government-wide recruitment, retention, and mobility systems, policies, and practices to further both agency-specific and government-wide diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts by acknowledging and redesigning historic institution inequities, removing obstacles, and creating new opportunities for employment and advancement in Illinois state government.

## **ORGANIZATIONAL CLIMATE & CULTURE**

- Systematic review, revision, replacement, and creation of agency-specific, and whenever possible, government-wide policies and practices to establish standards of excellence within agencies, boards, and commissions that prioritize diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility in order to eliminate the persisting institutional and systemic barriers within the ways work is done, or culture, and how it feels to work, or climate, of state government.

## **INFRASTRUCTURE & ACCOUNTABILITY**

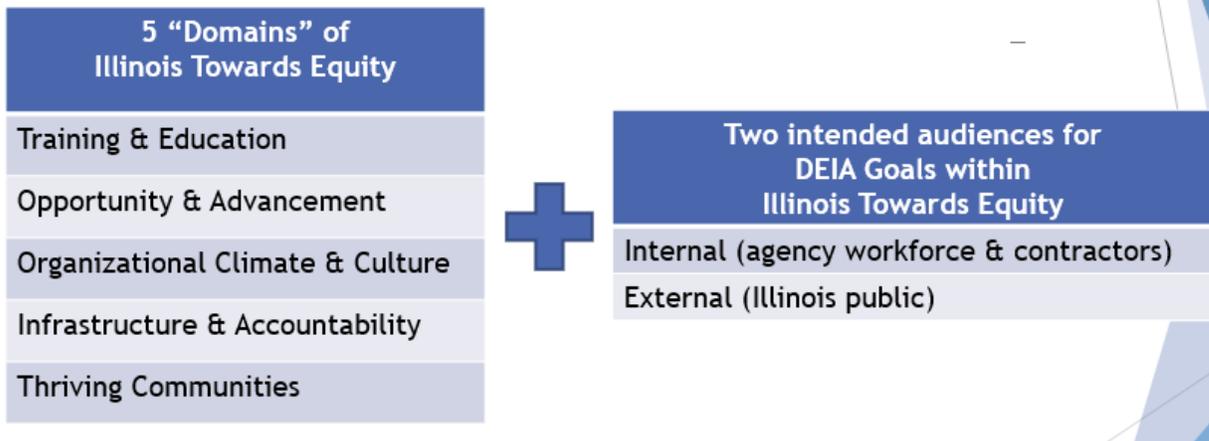
- Creation of an achievable, sustainable, and impactful state-wide DEI infrastructure through strategies, systems, and policies that advance agency and state-wide DEIA initiatives, embedding those approaches into strategic priorities, building requisite capacities and resources, and establishing both benchmarks and stakeholder engagements that increase accountability and transparency.

## **THRIVING COMMUNITY**

- Diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility-driven changes to government managed structures, wellbeing, lands, infrastructure, policies, and practices to enhance the wellbeing of the state workforce and public through increasing access to the resources, services, remedies, and spaces needed to (re)build health, safety, and opportunity and simultaneously combating the practices and policies sustaining the inequality, misfortune, exclusion, and inaccessibility experienced by communities across the state.

## **ACTION PLAN INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL GOALS**

- In addition to taking action within the five domains, agencies are able to articulate whether their goals are internally and/or externally focused. These elements were incorporated after careful review of the Governor's Office 20-21 DEI Action Plan goals that were submitted by agencies that sometimes were geared internally towards developing their workforce or strengthening their agencies' cultures and climates and sometimes were geared towards the strengthening the services, resources and programming they offered to the public.



## **Conclusion**

Accountability for the realization of Illinois *Towards Equity Action Plans* and organizational culture and climate change lies with leaders across all state agencies, boards, and commissions. These intentional and multi-year efforts must live beyond compliance or the minimum expectations of diversity and inclusion if Illinois is to be a leader in the nation in serving its people equitably. *The Illinois Toward Equity Action Plans* will be most effective when everyone working on behalf of the State of Illinois enacts a shared commitment to equity in their daily work and routine decision-making and the Office of Equity within the Office of the Governor is committed to providing ongoing resources, support and guidance our state agencies towards that critical endeavor.

## **ITE Action Planning Key Action Steps for State Agencies**

### **Making the Transition: From Governor's Office DEI Action Plans to Illinois Towards Equity**

- Share and discuss the implications of the 2020 Action Plan's Progress Report and next steps with agency leaders, staff and stakeholders where relevant
- Review [materials](#) and [resources](#) from the Office of Equity Summer Institute "Intersectional approaches to advancing equity in state government; tools for analysis action and accountability)

### **Illinois Towards Equity Planning Process**

- Convene DEIA project leads and committees
- Use the findings from the GO DEI 2020 progress report to guide and inform the ITE Action Planning Process
- Use the ITE SMARTIE Goals Worksheet to begin reviewing existing goals and objectives and crafting new ones for your agency's DEIA Action Plan.
- Attend the Office of Equity ITE Supporting Sessions

- September 12<sup>th</sup>, Illinois Towards Equity DEIA Action Plan Template Walkthrough
- September 22<sup>nd</sup>: DEIA Action Plan & Budgeting
- September 27<sup>th</sup>, Inclusive Leadership: Agency Leaders as Champions
- Attend Office of Equity ITE Technical Support Drop-in Sessions
  - September: 13<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 19<sup>th</sup>
  - October: 12<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>
- Agency accountability designee to submit ITE DEIA Action Plan to Governor's Office via their dedicated MS Teams channel by EOD **October 14<sup>th</sup>**

### **ITE Action Planning Toolkit Contents**

- The Illinois Towards Equity Action Framework (this document)
- [Illinois Towards Equity Action Plan PowerPoint](#) presentation(s)
- [SMARTIE Goals Worksheet](#)
- [ITE Glossary](#)
- [Office of Equity Resource Bank for ongoing learning and engagement](#)

### **Open Access**

The *Illinois Towards Equity Framework & Toolkit* are available on the Office of Equity's website to facilitate each agency or organization's implementation of the Illinois Towards Equity Action Plan. It is adaptable and open for use by community organizations and others committed to advancing equity within Illinois and beyond.

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**Notes/References**

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- <sup>xix</sup> The World Health Organization defines the social determinants (SDOH) as the conditions in which persons are born, grow, live, work and age.
- <sup>xx</sup> Barbara J. Love, 2010. "Developing a Liberatory Consciousness." In Adams, Blumenfeld, Casteneda, Hackman, Peters & Zuniga, (EDs), 2010. *Readings for Diversity and Social Justice*. NY: Routledge. Pp. 533-540.
- <sup>xxi</sup> (\*adapted from Crossroads Ministry and Jackson & Hardiman, 2006)

## **Appendix A. Methodology for the Creation of the Illinois Towards Equity Toolkit**

The Office conducted a landscape analysis to identify consistent strategies, goals, and challenges across agencies. In addition, the Office reviewed the unique strategies, goals, and challenges across Illinois State agencies engaged in DEIA efforts to aid in the creation of the tool kit. This intentional process was implemented to demonstrate to agencies that their experience, expertise and their needs would be integrated into future processes emanating from the Office of Equity.

**DEIA Landscape Analysis:**

- Morten Group's original DEI Action Plan templates
- The American Medical Association's "Strategic Plan to Embed Racial Justice and Advance Health Equity"
- The One Virginia Plan toolkit (no longer publicly available)
- "State of Oregon Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan" (2021)
- DEI and Racial Equity toolkits from Seattle, Portland, Pittsburgh, and other city governments
- Publicly available Government Alliance on Race and Equity (G.A.R.E.) resources
  - "Racial Equity: Getting to Results"
  - "Advancing Racial Equity and Transforming Government: A Resource Guide to Put Ideas into Action"
  - "Racial Equity Toolkit: An Opportunity to Operationalize Equity"

**Internal Review of Illinois Data and Processes (January – May 2022)**

- All 38 agency Governor's Office DEI Action Plans—goals and metric section
- Most recent versions of agencies' GO DEI Action Plans' progress updates
- Office of Equity Metrics Workgroup notes taken during 1:1 meetings with agency staff engaged in research, data and assessment initiatives
- Office of Equity mid-year DEI Action Plan implementation check-in meetings and surveys conducted with agency leadership and agency DEI Committees